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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE VISIT OF SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL TO HONDURAS, NOVEMBER 13, 2003

1. Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based liberal daily "La Tribuna" on 11/13 entitled "Missiles and helicopters". "The visit of Colin Powell to Central America wasn't just for pleasure. While he came to thank the countries supporting the U.S. in the coalition in Iraq, he also came to remind us that his country has a few million dollars, known as the Millennium Account, available to those developing democracies committed to foster political, economic and social reforms, as well as the fight against narcotrafficking and terrorism. When he visited Nicaragua, Powell talked about one of the issues that concern him the most: the region's security situation."

"The Americans have repeatedly warned the Nicaraguan government about the need to eliminate the ground-to-air missiles they have, which could fall in the wrong hands, such as the Colombian guerrillas or the terrorist groups operating in the region."

"This must be a matter of concern to us all. Some days ago, the international wires pointed out that these criminal groups are certainly interested in getting those missiles. For that reason, the U.S. has insisted that Nicaragua must get rid of their missiles. It's not odd that right after the visit of Colin Powell to that country, there has been a political struggle between President Bolanos, who is willing to comply with the U.S. demands, and the Sandinistas that hold control of Congress, who say that any decision on this matter must be taken by Congress."

"Other sectors have said that Nicaragua can destroy its missiles in exchange of getting some helicopters, the same request Honduras has made to the U.S. Unfortunately, they aren't willing to give away anything, and Powell was obviously clear on this issue, when he preferred to talk about the Millennium funds instead of making any commitment to give us the helicopters we need."

"So, the Nicaraguans shouldn't expect anything either. We won't give up our F-15s in exchange of the elimination of the dangerous missiles they have. The Nicaraguans shouldn't expect to get helicopters in exchange of their SAM-7s, because if the Americans give them helicopters, we should also get our helicopters too."

Palmer